

The Athenian Mercury.

Saturday, January 18. 1696.

Quest. 1.

Wether Light hath any Corporeity? If it hath, why doth it so pierce the Air and even hard and Diaphanous Bodies, as we see it doth. If it has not, how is it sensible, since it often affects the Eye with offence?

Answe. That Light is a real Body, or which is the same, that the Particles which strike on the Eye in such a manner as to produce such a Sensation are Corporeal, is now, we think, generally held: That 'tis not a quality, an accident, or meer mortification only, seems to be pretty plain from its first Original, for it had a Peculiar Creation; God said let there be Light and there was light, which looks too great for an accident, or imperfect, precarious being. But tho' it be Body, 'tis doubtless the most refin'd part of Body, Pure ether, it may be, if we know what that was, nay, the very efflorescence, and (if we might here use the word) Spirits, Essence, or Tincture, of Ether, and if Aristotle had made this his Quinta Essentia, he might have come nearer the Truth than in making it a mere accident. Now the parts of it must be suppos'd extremely fine, much finer than the pores of Water or Air through which it passes, which we know not else how it cou'd do; since otherwise those substances wou'd terminate and resist it. And 'tis the same in all other Diaphanous substances, tho' of never so close a contexture: The Rays of Light, the Sun-beams themselves, which we know are Body, because we can contract or dilate 'em, we are yet as sure, do pass through the Pores of Glass, unless there's something fix'd on the contrary side, to stop their Journey, in which case they are forc'd to bend back like the sword when a pass is made against any hard substance, and sometimes fly in Shivers, as that will do, which if you please you may call Reflection and Refraction. Day can find us, as well as we see that at a little hole, and it affects the Eye with pleasure as well as offence, unless in Owls and other Birds of Night; and we can perceive it in some measure, even through our closed Eyelids, and 'tis we think unaccountable how any thing but a real self-subsisting being shou'd make such a vivid Impression on our senses. There may perhaps be an objection made from that Light we fancy we see sometimes in the dark, or when we receive a blow on the Eye: But what if this shou'd only be an actual striking Fire. The excitation we mean, of some real particle of Light, lurking in some of the Humours of the Eye, which we doubt not do contain a sort of a Phosphor, which is extract'd by Chymists from a Liquor of the same substance with our Tears; as tis to be seen proceeding from the sweat of Horses and other Beasts, when strok'd in the night; and we have known it also in men; and the Ignis Lambens which has been seen on several person's Heads, we are apt to think is no other. However, we have our selves experienc'd, on intense reading, especially by Candle-Light, together with a heat tenderness of the Eye, Expression of Water, a mighty glazing Light, often returning, and remaining for sometime within the Organ, which we have sometimes fancy'd did not so much arise from an over-tension of the optic Nerve, by which some perhaps wou'd solve it, as from some accidental Chymical preparation of nature, like that we have already mention'd.

Quest. 2. Whether Darkness be a positive being, or a meer Privation of Light?

Answe. Aristotle is justly blam'd, even by those who have otherwise a great and a just esteem for him, for making Privation a Principle, for what do we mean by a principle of any thing, but that of which 'tis

compounded, and he may almost as well make Negation such as Privation, only one is attributed to a subject incapable of receiving such or such a Form as Negation of sight to a stone, the other to a capable subject, tho' either not yet induc'd into it, or after 'tis so, separated from it, as Blindness in one who either has formerly seen, or has a natural power of seeing, tho' the Eye it may be some-ways obstructed. Now this Privation is not known by the senses, by which nothing can be known but a positive and real being. But Darknes is not perceiv'd truly and positively, but only Negatively, as the Intellect collects that there is a want of Light, because the sight, when rightly dispos'd, can perceive nothing. We don't deny but Privation does oftentimes connote some real being, both in Metaphysical and Logical privation, as well as Physical: Thus evil, which is privation of Good, does yet oftentimes include some action, which must be positive, and so closely include it that we cannot but mentally separate from it, and that rather reciprocally, with a Metaphysical precision, than Negatively. Thus Blindness may have and often has something positive that causes it, and which one may almost call the very Form of it, as the Guttæ Serena, or Drop-Serene, as Mr. Milton experientially calls it, not to add a shot, a blow, or several other accidents, because only Transient, and rather the cause of blindness than the thing it self, as indeed is the former, tho' much more intimately united with it, and edging as far into the Essence of it as 'tis possible for a being into no Being. So in darkness, in which seems to be both a Logical and Physical privation into different senses, as it notes the absence of a future Form, Light, which will be in the Air as soon as day returns, tis Physical, as the absence of the same Form consider'd as past, when the Sun is set, tis rather Logical. But there has been Darknes something more positive than ti in either of these considerations, tho' that, we confess, supernatural, and, if you please, a Transcendental Darknes, as perhaps that was at the Death of our Saviour. And as we are ascertain'd from Scripture of that of Egypt, of which the Author of the Book of Wisdom, Cap. 17. v. 14. Say, "that it came upon 'em from the bottom of infinite Hell an Image of that darkness which shou'd afterwards receive them. Where Mr. Cowley had that noble butt in his Plagues of Egypt, Wherein he Fancies "that the darkness of Hell below, which is call'd utter Darkness over-shadow'd the Land; most probable it seems that 'twas some black, thick, and damp Vapour, which fill'd all the Air. But hear his own incomparable Verse, (one Line of which has more sense in't than a dozen of our New Plays faggated up together.) Plagues of Egypt. Stanza. 13.

From the deep baleful Caves of Hell below
Where the old Mother Night does grow,
Substantial Night, that does disdain
Privation's empty name.
Through secret Conduits monstrous shapes arose
Such as the Sun's whole force cou'd not oppose;
They with a solid Cloud
All Heavens Eclipsed Face did shroud;
seem'd with large Wings spread o're the Sea and
Earth
To brood up a new Chaos his deformed Birth.

Quest. 3. Does it not look suspitiously that Moses, at the giving of his Law to the Jews, wou'd not suffer any of 'em to come near the Mount, but plac'd Barriers round it, and charg'd 'em on pain of Death not to touch it, or approach it, adding as a Reason; Least

If any of the people shou'd break through to gaze,
etc.

Ausw. The visible and undeniable Hand of God in all those great wonders which Moses had before wrought in the sight of the Children, as well as the glorious appearance of God himself on the Mount, in such a manner as cou'd not be deceit, in the presence of so many hundreds of Thousands cou'd certainly leave no room for the least suspicion of practice and Imposture, on the people in the foremention'd Instance. That Holy Ground was distinguish'd from profane in such a manner as 'twas lawful for some to approach and not for others, and even those who might, not unless in a more devout posture and temper than at other times, we see in the whole Old Testament, and know that it cost the men of Bethlehem very dear for looking where they had nothing to do. All which was designd to teach the Jews what Purity and Holiness, both of body and mind God required of them.

Quest. 4. I find in the 12 Chap. of Heb. the Author of it affirming that when Moses gave the Law, he said to the people 'I exceedingly fear and quake. And in another place Jannes and Jambres, are mention'd as the Magicians which resisted him. Neither of which I can discover in the Old Testament. Pray, whence was the account of these matters, and how shall I be assur'd of the Truth of 'em?

Ausw. None can think that all the accidents which happen'd to Israel, from the time of their going into Egypt to the sealing the Prophets, and sealing of such immediate Inspiration, were committed to writing and many considerable passages might be, and doubtless were handed down by Tradition among them; and a very learned person of our Church takes both these to be of that Nature, as well as Enoch's Prophecy and the dispute of Michael and the Devil concerning the Body of Moses. In the latter, that of Jannes and Jambres, this may hold, but we humbly conceive there's no need on't in the former: There being frequent mention in the Jewish writers of these two persons, as chief of the Egyptian Magicians, tho' their names sometimes a little alter'd. In the Babylonish Talmud they are stiled Johanne and Mamre, and 'tis added that they said to Moses in the Proverb. 'Affers tu stramen in Afram. Thou workest wonders here in Egypt, which is so full of Magicians already in Jonithans Chald. Paraphrase, they are call'd Janes and Jimbris. In the Talmud Johanne and Mambre, In Vir. Mosis, Jane and Mambre: In Lib. Zochar, Jones and Jambres, in another of their Books Jonos and Jambros, and in one of 'em John and Ambrose: They were it seems so famous that they are mention'd in Heathen Authors, Numenius, Arioste, and others. And some old writers affirm that they were both drown'd with Pharo in the Red-Sea, and a Kenotaph, or empty Honorary Sepulcher, afterworts erected for them: However, there's no doubt but there were such men, and that such were their names, otherwise they had not been recorded, the Holy Spirit of God being as infallible in the writers of the New Testament as he was before in them of the old.

For that of Moses saying, I exceedingly Fear and Quake, there is not, we think, any need of flying to the same Tradition to explain it, because if we are not extremely mistaken as much is expressed in the Old Testament, for we find in Exod. 19. 16. " 'Tis said all the people that were in " the Camp trembled, and again, where 'tis said in our Translation, and in the Hebrew, (as well as indeed in all other except the Arabic and that we are about to quote) at the end of v. 18. " The " whole mount quaked greatly, the zo read " the " whole people quaked greatly, having it seems read [kol Ha-ām, for kol Ha-bar.] And the very word

σοβάξει is used by them, which expresses exceedingly more fully than 'tis in the Apostles writings, where 'tis only included in the words, ἐγέρθη and ἀνεγέρθη. But still what's all this to Moses his saying, he did himself exceedingly fear and quake, we think a great deal, for if he writ the Book of Exodus, which we know no good men that doubt, and he says therein, as he does, that all the people that was in the Camp trembled; and again that all the people were afraid even to stupefaction εγένετο οἱ λαοὶ, and he himself was in the Camp, and one of the people, then he says we think, as fairly as can be, that he himself did fear and quake, as the Apostle affirms of him.

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